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UNCLAS TUNIS 000800

SENSITIVE
SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR DRL/IRF AND NEA/MAG

E.O. 12958: N/A
TAGS: PHUM KIRF TS
SUBJECT: BISHOP OF TUNIS ON RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

¶1. (SBU) Underlining the October 26 release of the Department's 2009 International Religious Freedom Report, the Ambassador used the occasion of an October 27 meeting with Monsignor Maroun Lahham, (Roman Catholic) Bishop of Tunis, to seek the prelate's views on religious freedom in Tunisia. Lahham, who was familiar with the report, praised Tunisia as having a tolerant, enlightened, intellectual society in which the Christian minority is respected and protected.

¶2. (SBU) Bishop Lahham noted that while proselytizing is forbidden by law, conversion to Christianity is not illegal and Tunisian converts have not encountered any harassment from the GOT. (Note: Unlike other states in the region, Tunisian identity cards do not include religion as a category, so the potentially problematic question of ammending them does not arise. End note.)

¶3. (SBU) Bishop Lahham said that the church in Tunisia was working on registering its properties with civil authorities. While this issue was not pressing, he worried that, in the event the Tunisian state took on a more rigid Islamist character, church properties might be vulnerable to confiscation.

GRAY